CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION ITEM

SUBJECT
Proposal to implement a new false alarm management solution and update Bellevue City Code, Chapter 9.16.

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POLICY ISSUES
Bellevue City Code
The current False Alarm Ordinance (BCC Chapter 9.16) was adopted in 1977.

Should the City implement a new false alarm management solution and amend the existing City Code?

DIRECTION NEEDED FROM COUNCIL
___Action
_X_Discussion
_X_Information

Council will be provided with background information related to the quantity and workload impact of false alarms on the Police Department and the negative impact that repeated response has on the Safe Community Outcome in Bellevue. A direct correlation between this impact and the proposed solution of a false alarm management company will be presented.

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS
Patrol Officers are the first line of defense in the protection of the city and its citizens. The more these officers are available to respond to emergency calls and engage in proactive patrol, the better. One of the calls for service that repeatedly detracts from a Patrol Officer's ability to respond to calls and patrol proactively is false burglar alarms. In recent years, false alarms have accounted for over 98% of all alarm calls. These unnecessary responses divert law enforcement resources from crimes in progress, other emergency situations and time spent patrolling assigned areas. False alarms can also desensitize communities to actual incidents of burglary, and can lead to neighbors ignoring audible alarms making security systems less reliable. Over the last four years, the Department has responded to an average of 3,360 alarms each year. The Bellevue Police Department loses approximately 1,700 hours of officer patrol time to false alarms each year at an annual cost of over $85,000.

One of the ways the Police Department determines law enforcement best-practices is through our membership with Benchmark Cities, a group of similarly-sized Police Departments across the country that share ideas and policies. Most of the member agencies in Benchmark Cities utilize false alarm management programs as these programs have proven to help manage and reduce the amount of false

alarms. Consistent with the best practices of our Benchmark Cities partners, the Police Department recommends implementation of a program that will directly support both the City's and the Police Department's mission statements by allowing officers to spend more time actually fighting and reducing crime, rather than responding to false alarms.

Currently, there is an outdated False Alarm Ordinance in existence (Chapter 9.16), but the ordinance and the Police Department's equally outdated management system are both inadequate to meet the needs of the Department. The Department's former system for managing false alarms involved the use of antiquated, inadequately designed software and the part-time services of a Crime Prevention Detective. (That system and the associated software became obsolete in 2011 when NORCOM began using NewWorld for its CAD software.) The City does not currently require any type of registration or permit for alarms at businesses and/or residences, so the Detective would simply bill business owners and homeowners for false alarms using a matrix and predefined fee schedule. Without a registration requirement, bills for false alarms often did not reach the owner because the Department was not notified of address changes and/or the site owner frequently was at a location other than the alarm location.

When considering the population of Bellevue and the presence of an estimated 7,000-8,000 alarms in the city, research indicates that an effective and efficient false alarm administration program would do the following:
- **Reduce the number of false alarms**
  This would be accomplished by rigorously enforcing revised false alarm ordinance provisions. No alarm would be missed, and typical results show a decrease in false alarms of 40% to 80%. For example, the Auburn Police Department realized a 59% reduction in false alarms over a five-year period.
- **Require permitting and registration for greater accountability and better response**
  o Utilizing online registration procedures, permitting would be convenient and accessible.
- **Process false alarms faster and more efficiently**
  o Implementing Enhanced Call Verification (ECV), an industry standard that requires two attempts to contact an alarm owner to verify an alarm prior to Police response.
  o Utilizing a fully integrated false alarm database, flexible business rules, and extensive search and reporting capabilities would provide for daily false alarm processing, notifications, billing, and collections.
- **Maximize collections of false alarm fees**
  o The system would be designed to bill and collect all authorized charges accurately and timely. Typically, clients realize collection rates of 75% to 85% and higher.
- **Provide quality citizen support**
  o Utilizing specially trained staff members, thorough operating procedures, and comprehensive technology infrastructure would ensure our citizens receive accurate, calm, consistent support and responsiveness to their service calls.

Maximizing the reduction in false alarm calls could be achieved by the following:
- **Prevention**
  o Educational campaigns, public relations, press releases, dedicated website, FAQ's, etc.
- **Effective Tracking**
  o Data indicates that cities requiring permits that allow for more improved tracking have lower false alarm rates.

- **Enforcement**
  - Including daily alarm processing, notification and billing of false alarm events, close monitoring of top offenders, rigorous follow-through on collections, and management of delinquent accounts.
- **Remediation**
  - Including online awareness classes which would waive the first false alarm fee if completed.

It is estimated that these changes will increase the efficiency of the Police Department by saving hundreds of hours of police officer response time. The expected result is a significant reduction of false alarms within one year, with continued reductions of false alarm incidents into the future.

ALTERNATIVES
Alternative 1- No Change, Continue with Current Practice

Currently, there is no system in place to require mandatory alarm registration of an estimated 7,000-8,000 alarms and the Department does not have computer software that can manage registration, billing and collection of false alarm fees. The Police Department would continue to respond to approximately 3,300 false alarms per year. The City would lose about 1,700 hours of patrol officer time at a cost of about $85,000 per year, and would not recover those costs from false alarm registration fees or fines.

Alternative 2- Administer the False Alarm Program Internally utilizing additional staffing and software
Software packages are available for the purpose of managing false alarm programs internally. The software handles all aspects of false alarm management including registration, billing and fee and fine collection. All other support functions, including IT support, would be provided by the City.

This alternative would require an additional two FTEs for the Police Department. Our recommended staffing model would include one civilian staff member to coordinate the program and another civilian staff member to run the program, at an estimated cost of approximately $200,000 annually. The need for two FTEs to administer this program is based on research conducted with Benchmark Cities and other local Police Departments. Olathe, Kansas, has a similar population to Bellevue, but they only have 3,314 registered alarms. They have one civilian FTE to administer the false alarm management program. Indian River County, Florida, has a similar population to Bellevue, but they have 7,000 registered alarms. They utilize two civilians to administer the false alarm management program. Within our region, the City of Kirkland, has a smaller population than Bellevue and has 3,500 registered alarms. An administrative clerk manages the false alarm program, dedicating approximately 20-30 hours per week to the management of false alarms. Based upon this research and the existence of an estimated 7,000-8,000 alarms in the City of Bellevue, staff estimate the need for two new FTEs to internally administer a false alarm program.

The software package costs approximately $48,300 and requires annual software maintenance at a cost of $6,000. This alternative would also require updating the City of Bellevue False Alarm ordinance.

Cost Summary for Alternative 2
Two additional FTEs	$200,000 (annually)
Software purchase	48,300 (one time)
Software maintenance	6,000 (annually)

Alternative 3– Utilize an External Vendor to Administer the False Alarm Program
External vendors are available that specialize in false alarm administration and management, have proven track records, and do not require the significant costs of internal staffing and software acquisition. This option is a cost neutral solution, with all program costs obtained from the collection of alarm registration fees. The external vendor would be responsible for collecting an annual alarm registration fee that is consistent with other area Police Departments. The vendor will also collect false alarm fines. A portion of the registration fee would support the administration of this program. The City will retain the remainder of the annual registration fees and 100% of any fines collected.

Should Council choose this solution, a current Detective would serve as the Police Department liaison to the outside vendor. This alternative, like alternative 2 above, will save police officers from responding to unnecessary false alarm calls.

This alternative also requires updating the City's False Alarm ordinance.

<u>Cost Summary for Alternative 3</u>
Additional FTE's	$0
Software purchase	0
Software maintenance	0

<u>RECOMMENDATION</u>
The Police Department recommends proceeding with **Alternative 3**. This option would initiate the process of soliciting an external partner/vendor for false alarm management utilizing an RFP approach. This alternative was determined to be the most efficient use of police resources. This will increase officers' ability to respond more quickly to other emergency calls for service. This alternative is the most cost-effective solution as it does not require new staffing and can be managed by current staff.